School District Review Report

District Name: Sunshine Coast

District Number: #46

Superintendent: Des Sjoquist

Date of Visit: March 2-5, 2003

Team Chair: Anne Cooper, Superintendent SD#19-Revelstoke

Team Members: Lauralee Edgell, Vice Principal SD#70, Elaine Greenhalgh, Teacher SD#37, John Frishholz, District Administrator-First Nations (retired) SD#72, Kathy Froelich, Parent SD#42, Randy Huth, Principal SD#75, Gerald Morton, Ministry of Education.

Summary of Process

The Sunshine Coast School District Review is one of twenty school district reviews being undertaken in the year 2002-2003.

The purpose of the District Review is to provide feedback and recommendations to the district, the Ministry of Education, and the public regarding the district's work in improving student achievement by:

- reviewing district and school achievement data;
- reviewing the district Accountability Contract and school plans to improve student achievement;
- making recommendations to the Board and to the Minister about improving student achievement; and
- Identifying promising practices that will assist other districts and schools in their efforts to improve student achievement.

External Review Team Activities:

- On the first morning of the Review, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Board, senior district staff, a representative of the Learning Community Team and a representative of the District Education Interpretation Committee presented an overview of the district, which included in depth information regarding district goals and objectives. Also in attendance was the President of the Sunshine Coast Teachers' Association.

- During the remainder of the visit, members of the District Review Team met at each of the fourteen district schools for approximately two-hours. At the schools, the Team members met with representatives of the School Planning Council consisting of parents, administrators, and teachers. In addition, some visits included CUPE representatives, Sunshine Coast Teachers' Association staff representatives, and in one case, a student.

- The Review Team also met with staff associated with the District aboriginal program. Participants at this meeting included: the District Principal for Aboriginal Education, the teacher for the Morningside program (who also represented the Aboriginal Field Committee), the aboriginal full day kindergarten teacher, district aboriginal program teachers, a school principal and a special education teacher.

- The Team met with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent to consider additional information regarding the District Performance Plan.

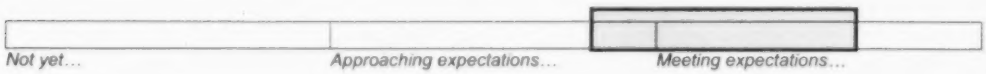
In addition to these visits, the Review Team reviewed:

- the District's Accountability Contract (District Performance Plan);
- school plans for all of the schools in the district;
- the progress of the school district and schools in meeting their goals and performance targets;
- the strategies employed at the school and district levels used to support the District Accountability Contract (District Performance Plan) and school growth plans;
- various materials provided as examples of work that they are doing to achieve their school goals; and
- District and school data provided by the Ministry of Education, the School District and individual schools.

At the conclusion of its visit the External Review Team Chair met with the Chair of the Board and senior administration to summarize the conclusions made by the Review Team.

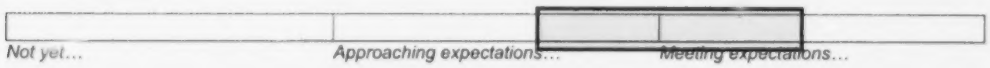
Observations in Key Areas - Focus on Student Achievement

1. *Goals:*
   (Improving districts have a strong instructional focus. This focus is made visible in clear goals for improving student learning.)



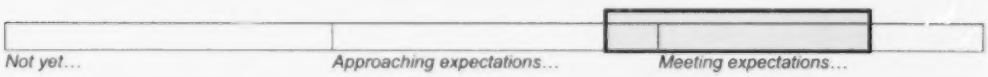
   - The district's goal "To support a district focus on numeracy, social responsibility, literacy and aboriginal education" is directly linked to the improvement of student learning.
   - The broad nature of this goal, which includes 14 objectives, appears to reflect long term District objectives, and could be refined to provide an annual focus.
   - At the school level there is a range of connection between goals and student achievement.

2. *Rationale:*
(Improving districts have a thorough and connected set of reasons based on evidence for the selection of their student achievement goals.)



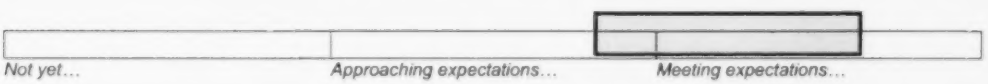
- The district has carefully considered the performance of aboriginal students.
- The rationale for school goals is clearly stated in many school plans; some school plans will need to be supplemented with a data-based rationale.

3. *Data:*
(Improving districts are actively considering at least three sources of evidence including classroom, school and district/provincial levels. The analysis of this evidence has informed the selection of the district goals.)



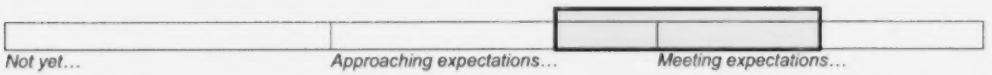
- The District's Annual Monitoring System, the District Education Interpretation Committee, and a review of school based data play a key role in determining district objectives.
- There is considerable analysis of data on an ongoing basis at the district level.
- Schools have met the challenge to collect, analyze and interpret data. Many schools are actively considering four sources of evidence, including classroom, school, district, and provincial data.

4. *Strategies:*
(Improving districts have a well-organized, focused improvement plan in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking.)



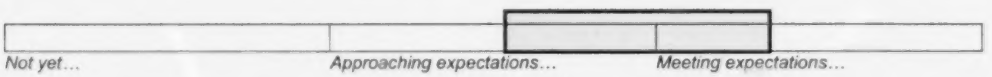
- The district has identified a wide range of strategies to support student learning and schools have developed strategies to meet the unique needs of their individual student population.
- Both at the school and district level, a broad based discussion of educational research and shared experience in the process of identifying strategies would support improvement planning.
- The Learning Community Team is integral to district and school strategies.
- In a number of schools there was a school-wide commitment to goal driven strategies and enthusiasm for the results being achieved.

5. *Structures:*
   (Improving districts have aligned structures - resources, time, organizations - to get the results they want. This includes effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.)



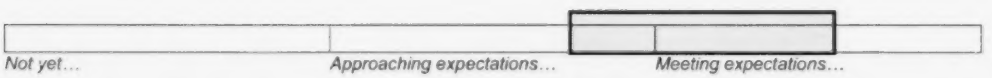
- The district promotes school autonomy by allowing schools to allocate resources in ways appropriate to their individual needs. This is both a strength and a weakness as the district has very limited capacity to direct resources to areas of highest need.
- Schools are accessing resources through the Learning Community Team.
- Several schools have been innovative in restructuring resources, time, and organizing to support goals linked to student achievement.
- The District must ensure that at all levels of the system, human resources are aligned with a focus on student achievement.

6. *Results:*
   (Improving districts get improved student learning results – at the classroom, school and district levels.)



- The District's Annual Monitoring System provides a regular source of data regarding student achievement and overall district success.
- Baseline and targets are evident at the district level, and in schools to varying degrees. Some schools are exceeding expectations in this area. Systemic work in the area of baselines and targets would benefit a number of schools.
- The District's Dogwood completion rate has shown significant improvement in the last two years. The focus on this objective was evident across the District.

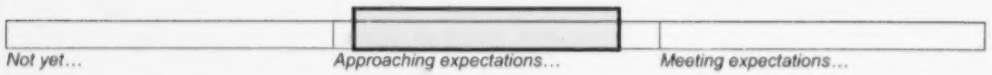
7. *Communication:*
   (Improving districts communicate and make public their improvement goals and the progress being made.)



- Most schools use a variety of effective strategies for communicating with parents around school goals.
- The district promotes additional opportunities to share information with the community regarding school goals and progress towards attaining these goals through forums and focus groups.
- Opportunities for schools to share and benefit from each other's experience need to be nurtured in order to collect and refine 'Best Practices.'

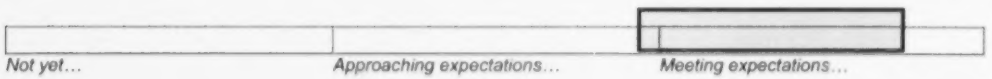
8. *Partnership – District & School Coherence*:

(Improving districts have a dynamic and interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and school – district directions are both valued.)



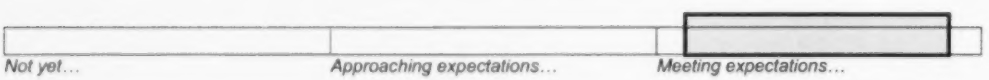
- The district has recognized the need to continue to refine the connection between district and school plans in light of the implementation of School Planning Councils.
- School uniqueness is highly valued, as evidenced by the commitment to a decentralized budget model, and therefore School Plans ought to influence the district performance plan to a greater degree.

9. *Partnership – District and Parent Involvement:*
(Improving districts work as a team with parents, including specific groups of parents.)



- There are numerous opportunities for parents to be involved at the District level.
- Parent participation and knowledge of School Growth Plans was evident at a large number of schools.
- The District has provided support and exercised clear leadership with regards to establishing School Planning Councils.
- There has been a concerted effort to include and involve Aboriginal parents, both those who are members of Sechelt First Nation and those who are off reserve or non-status.

10. *Leadership / Teamwork:*
(Improving districts are led by district leaders with a clear vision for, and commitment to, school improvement and improving student achievement. Principals, vice-principals, teacher, parent and student leadership is encouraged and systematically developed – with a focus on improving student learning.)



- In School District #46, relationships are valued and respected by all partner groups in the District creating an environment of trust and mutual respect.
- There has been significant work around the implementation of School Planning Councils.
- It is obvious that the district has communicated the expectation at the school level for a focus on improving student achievement.
- The District has made many efforts to make known to the community the focus on student achievement.
- School based administrators, teachers, and parents assume leadership roles in the district.

Strengths

- Across the District, schools are collecting and reflecting on data related to student achievement. There is exemplary work in school improvement planning by a number of schools.
- The District has made a real commitment to sharing improvement goals with the community at large, and in particular, with the Aboriginal community
- There is meaningful involvement of parents in this district, and parents are active participants in the school planning process.
- There is innovation in this district – schools have a lot to learn from each other.
- There is a powerful presence of respect and trust in the district

Promising Practices

- Active engagement of School Planning Councils in the planning process.
- A variety of communication strategies such as: forums, focus groups, and Trustee liaison.
- An Alternate Program, with a richness of assessment and a richness in delivery, is very successfully meeting the unique needs of large numbers of individual students.
- A well developed school based budgeting model.
- Creative structural changes at the school level to facilitate student success (release time available for teachers to work collaboratively, block timetabling at the elementary level, emphasis on individual student's needs, platooning to achieve reductions in class size, and provision of additional instruction in Math at the secondary level).
- Processes that have nurtured highly positive relationships with employee groups.
- Very effective community school programs.
- An innovative early identification program for pre-schoolers at the school level.
- The Learning Community Team as a mechanism to support school improvement.

Recommendations

Recommendations for strengthening school and district focus on student achievement and for improving results:

- Clarify the yearly planning cycle, including timelines.
- Evaluate the District office staffing levels to provide the necessary structural support for the district's ambitious student achievement agenda.
- Consider structures that will create the opportunity for: sharing of exemplary school goals, more support for schools in the school planning process, developing higher levels of communication among schools, greater connectedness between district and school goals, and support for the Learning Community Team.
- Revisit the communication plan around the District goals and the District planning process in order to promote a common language and understanding in the District.

"There are some wonderful nuggets here . . . . we just have to put them together."

Follow Up

Required follow up with specific time frame may take the form of:

- Ministry phone call
- Deputy Minister visit
- District report to the Ministry
- Review of the next year's district contract
- Special Advisor appointment